



Library Rating Systems

Hennen's American Public Library Ratings (HAPLR)

www.haplr-index.com

Library Journal Index of Public Library Service (LJ Index)

www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6629180.html

Your library is not just a number

We know that. The library statistics that we collect don't always reflect how well you are serving your community, and many of the most important things you do cannot be counted. That said, library statistics do serve several useful purposes. They give some quantifiable idea of how busy the library is and the status of your collections, budget and staffing. They allow us to see trends over time. They give us data that appeals to the number-crunchers in the group when we are advocating for our libraries.

Finally, they allow us to compare ourselves to other libraries. Hennen's American Public Library Ratings (HAPLR) and the Library Journal Index of Public Library Service (LJ Index) are two efforts to take multiple public library data elements that are collected nationally and distill them into a single measure of library "goodness."

What does my HAPLR or LJ score mean?

In general, libraries with generous operating and materials budgets, ample staffing and high circulation and visits are thought to be better than poorly funded, understaffed, poorly used

libraries. HAPLR and LJ attempt to make this distinction between libraries. Scores should be viewed in ranges as approximate – a score of 1 higher doesn't necessarily mean "1 better."

To a certain extent, both HAPLR and LJ are "beauty contests," giving the libraries that end up at the top of the heap bragging rights. If your library scores highly, it's a good public relations opportunity to celebrate it. High-scoring libraries can also be seen as possible models of what good library service looks like.

If your library receives a low score, it doesn't hurt to take a look at why that might have occurred. It might be that the library is struggling with funding, or needs to update its collection to improve circulation. However, neither HAPLR nor LJ should be used to single out libraries as having poor performance. Because of the limitations of the data, a library may be doing an excellent job of serving its community, but in ways that are not fully reflected in HAPLR/LJ. These numbers are only one part of the picture.

What are some of the limitations in the ratings?

There are four major limitations in both rating systems:

1. Peer library groups: HAPLR groups libraries for comparison by population level; LJ by operating budget. Either method can place disparate libraries in the same group.
2. Busyness vs. "Goodness": The two are not necessarily equal, but the library data that is available nationally measures activity rather than impact.



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3. Legal service area vs. actual patrons: Both indexes rely on per capita measures using the library's legal service area population. Patrons, however, will go to the closest library that will have them regardless of legal boundaries.
4. Libraries that don't report can't play: If a library fails to report one data element that either HAPLR or LJ uses to calculate scores, that library is not included in the rankings.

The population issue is perhaps the biggest limitation. A library that serves a large population just outside its legal boundaries may have its per capita circulation, visits and other measures skewed high. When looking at libraries with a circ per capita of 50 or 60, it's possible that they may be serving a large population outside their legal service area. Nearly half of the HAPLR rating measures and all of the LJ Index measures are dependent on the library's legal service area population.

How libraries are grouped

HAPLR groups libraries according to population. It uses the same population categories as IMLS does in its national summaries, with one exception: HAPLR combines libraries with more people, 500,000 to 1 million in population with those over 1 million. This was done so that the top grouping was not too small. HAPLR groupings have widely varying numbers of libraries in them. The smallest category, >500,000, had only 83 libraries in the most recent edition, while the largest category, 10,000-25,000, had 1,773. For this reason, it is more important to look at the HAPLR score and percentile rather than the numerical ranking within your population group. LJ Index groups libraries by total operating expenditures. For libraries with less than \$5 million in expenditures, the dollar amounts were set so that each group would have approximately the same number of libraries – a little bit more

than a thousand (1,088 to 1,247). There are substantially fewer libraries with expenditures over \$5 million, and those were split into three much smaller groups.

In both HAPLR and LJ, scores are only comparable *within* groupings. It is not valid to compare scores from one population or budget group to those in another group.

How libraries are scored: HAPLR

HAPLR uses 15 weighted factors; 6 input measures and 9 output measures. Some are data elements reported to IMLS, and some are calculated from data elements reported.

Input/output	Weight	Factor(s)
Input	3	Expenditures per capita
	2	Percent of budget to materials; Materials expenditure per capita; FTE staff per 1,000 population
	1	Periodicals per 1,000 population; Volumes per capita
Output	3	Cost per circulation (low to high); Visits per capita
	2	Collection turnover; Circulation per FTE staff hour; Circulation per capita; Reference per capita; Circulation per hour
	1	Visits per hour; Circulation per visit

To calculate HAPLR scores, libraries are ranked within their group on each measure separately. Your library might be ranked 300th of 1,000 libraries in your group on expenditures per capita, but 250th on visits per hour. HAPLR uses that ranking on each individual measure to generate a number. Those individual measure



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scores are weighted and combined into the overall HAPLR score. The actual calculations are more complex; full explanation, with example, is at www.haplr-index.com/calculationdetails.html

HAPLR posts a list of the top 10 libraries in each population category. Library scores are also available on the site by state and by individual library.

How libraries are scored: LJ Index

LJ Index uses 4 per capita measures: library visits, circulation, program attendance and public Internet computer uses. LJ's authors indicated that these 4 measures were used because they correlate "strongly, positively and significantly." These measures are not weighted, meaning that each counts equally toward the library's score.

As with HAPLR, each measure is calculated individually within each group, and then all four measures are combined into a total score for your library. LJ Index uses a formula that starts with the statistical mean average of that measure for libraries in that group. Then, they look at how far above or below the average your library's score is, while also adjusting for the "spread" of the entire set of data by using the standard deviation in the calculations. A full explanation may be found here:

www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6636731.html

LJ Index gives the top libraries in each budget category five, four or three stars for the overall score and for the individual measures. Each star-rating group has 10 libraries, except in the top budget categories where the number of libraries is much smaller. LJ index makes spreadsheets available with all the data for rated libraries.

Differences between the two systems

The main difference between HAPLR and LJ is that HAPLR uses input measures that are dependent on budget while LJ does not. (LJ

groups by budget, however.) LJ's authors give two reasons for this. First, library support might not appear in the budget; in Wyoming, substantial electronic resources do not come out of local budgets. Second, celebrating a library's ample budget may invite a backlash from those who want to slash tax expenditures.

HAPLR weights some elements more heavily than others, while LJ gives equal weight to its four measures.

LJ Index includes public Internet computer use, which HAPLR does not. Public computer use is a newer data element, and HAPLR's author Thomas Hennen indicates on his site that he believes computer use is still too dissimilar to use.

On the other hand, HAPLR uses reference statistics, which LJ does not. The authors indicate there was a reason, but they do not elaborate. In past years, reported Wyoming reference per capita numbers varied wildly among libraries – as much as 40:1. Scores this disparate may indicate some recording and reporting error.

As mentioned earlier, libraries can't be rated if they don't report one or more data elements needed for the calculations. In addition, the LJ Index eliminates libraries with a population of less than 1,000 and a budget of less than \$10,000. Because of the differing data elements and exclusions, the LJ Index excludes about 2,000 of the more than 9,000 public libraries, while HAPLR only excludes about 200.

The HAPLR site provides a side by side comparison of HAPLR scores and LJ Index scores by state at: www.haplr-index.com/LJ_HAPLR_ScoreComparisons_2009-06.htm.



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How do I maximize my score?

The simplest way to maximize scores in both systems is to serve a large community living outside your legal service area. This is clearly not, however, under your library's control.

Both HAPLR and LJ Index use service measures that focus on high volume – circulation, visits, etc. It's important to track these so that you do not under-report when this data is collected. Since HAPLR has so many budget-related measures, it is difficult to get a high score without large operating expenditures. In past years, Ohio libraries have dominated HAPLR, thanks in part to generous state aid. Now that Ohio has cut funding, it's likely that those libraries will fall in the ratings in future editions.

Although the libraries that rise to the top in both indexes are clearly doing good things, it is important not to get too wrapped up in the HAPLR or LJ Index number. The more important thing is to evaluate how well the library is serving its community, not how high a score it gets. HAPLR and LJ Index are just ways of looking at library data in an organized way to attempt to measure library quality. They can be useful, but they are only two of the tools in the box.

Questions?

Contact Susan Mark, Wyoming State Library Statistics Librarian at smark@state.wy.us or 307-777-5915.



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